

31 AUG 1997

Merdeka-Australia

MALAYSIANS DOWN UNDER CELEBRATE NATIONAL DAY

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, Aug 31 (Bernama) -- Malaysian groups, diplomatic and consular staff and students throughout Australia today celebrated, in a variety of functions, Malaysia's 40th National Day.

It was "open house" at the Malaysian High Commission in Canberra where hundreds of staff and students joined High Commissioner Dato Adnan Othman in prayers and celebrations.

Consular staff in the main cities of Australia gathered at their Dewan Malaysia for the raising for the Malaysian flag and food fairs.

Malaysian student groups who could not travel to state capitals held their own parties on campuses.

About 520 Malaysians and Australians held a Merdeka Ball in Brisbane. It was hosted by the Australia Malaysia Business Council, Queensland (AMBCQ) and attended by Queensland Premier Rob Borbidge, Malaysian Deputy High Commissioner Halimah Abdullah, Opposition Leader Peter Beattie and Queensland Trade Minister Doug Slack. -- MORE

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In his welcoming speech, AMBCQ president Dr Peter Yeoh Tiong Yong said Malaysia had been blessed by visionary prime ministers, but the country's greatest successes and achievements had been under Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Dr Mahathir has been the driving force, the inspiration, the visionary, the architect, the planner of what Malaysia is today. He is indeed a dynamic personality, much admired at home and abroad for his great achievements in making Malaysia a progressive and modern society," Yeoh, formerly of Klang, said.

Puan Halimah told the gathering, which included about 120 Malaysian students, that functions like the Brisbane Ball would "undoubtedly provide an avenue for closer contacts and relations between Malaysians and Australians".

Premier Borbidge said Malaysia was "already a role model for social and economic development among other countries. It is certainly a country from which we in Queensland can draw useful lessons."

Opposition Leader Beattie recalled the many visits he and his wife had made to Malaysia where his sister lived for many years. "When I first visited Malaysia the sign "Awat" warned us of the communist threat. Nowadays "awat" warns us of the danger of and penalty for ganja.

"I wonder if Pauline Hanson is on ganja," he said, prompting much laughter.

The Malaysian Students' Association of the University of Queensland provided several cultural items including a fascinating parade of Malaysian costumes. -- BERNAMA

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